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Louis J. Acompora Foundation

www.la12.org

I would like to begin my testimony today by telling you about my son. Louis was an exceptional young man. He was a member of the National Honor Society and had won the Scholastic Athlete of the Year Award in his Junior High School. He was the co-captain and goalie of the JV lacrosse team but most importantly, he was loved by his family, friends and community.

On March 25th he was playing in his first lacrosse game of his high school career. Early in the 2nd quarter he blocked a routine shot with his chest. He took a few steps and collapsed right there on the field. As the Chain of Survival recommends, 9-1-1 was called and Louis' coach started CPR on him right away, but to no avail. We didn't know it at the time, but Louis was in cardiac arrest.

As his father and I stood by watching helplessly, Louis died on the field that day because there was still one very important link in the Chain of Survival that was missing. There was no Automated External Defibrillator, known as an AED, available to anyone until EMS arrived. That was 12 minutes after the event and it was already too late.

Louis was only 14 years old.

Louis died from a syndrome known as Commotio Cordis. This occurs when a blunt impact, such as the lacrosse ball, interrupts a critical rhythm in the heart. The heart begins to quiver, going into cardiac arrest. The only known treatment is defibrillation. IMMEDIATE defibrillation, such as with an AED. Up until then, Louis was 100 percent healthy and wearing a chest protector. It just didn't matter.

No parent can prepare for this, nor can parents and family know what will come of such a horrendous tragedy. For us, we decided it was important to educate and help promote awareness of Commotio Cordis and the need for Automated External Defibrillators. That's when we started the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation. The Foundation began hosting events to educate schools, coaches and parents about this issue and we began advocating through legislation. On a local level, the Suffolk County Legislature embraced this issue and formed a task force to determine where and to what extent AED's should be placed in our County. They lent their support to the state, they completed placement of AEDs in 100% of our police patrol cars and have equipped county parks, beaches, golf courses and county buildings to be equipped with AED's and the staff trained to use them. Many lives have already been saved by our police, who are usually the first to arrive on the scene. But, we knew there was more work to be done.

On the state level, where school laws originate, we worked with legislators toward an AED in the Schools law. Louis' Law was passed on May 7th 2002. The bill was signed by Gov. Pataki on graduation day at Louis' High School. This legislation was enacted to add a new section 917 to the Education Law requiring school districts, BOCES, county vocational education and extension boards, and charter schools to provide and maintain on-site, in each instructional school facility, at least one functional automated external defibrillator (AED) for use during cardiac emergencies. Louis' Law requires public school officials and administrators responsible for such school facilities to ensure the presence of at least one staff person who is trained in the operation and use of an AED.

The goal of this law is to save other children, but we recognize that schools are large workplaces and serve as the gathering places for the community, for children and adults of all ages, all at risk for a cardiac event.

The effect of this legislation has been enormous. Because of this important life-saving legislation, because of Louis' Law, we know of at least 44 lives that have already been saved within NY public schools – and 19 of those lives are children. There are probably more, that we don't even know about. This means that there are 19 sets of parents who did NOT have to bury their own child. There are 44 lives still with us, 44 different families who have not had to lose a loved one to cardiac arrest, families that would NOT have to wonder...what if there was an AED available?

The success of New York State AED legislation has prompted other states to follow in our footsteps. Many have realized that it is our responsibility to protect our children and our communities by having school systems that can provide a standard of care that is on par with the technology available in today's world.

Can you even imagine a school building without a fire alarm or fire extinguisher?

There has also been a ripple effect from the passage of Louis' Law that is difficult to measure. With close to 700 districts in New York State, we've seen schools make amazing strides. Schools have formed teams, working together across roles, across barriers, to ensure that our children and our community are protected in a cardiac emergency.

We know that there are so many more people in the community trained in CPR & AED, teachers, custodians, staff who are not just school employees but members of our communities. Schools have expanded their own CPR training programs to also train students, knowing that it is these children who might be responsible for recognizing the signs or calling 9-1-1, or even saving the life of others. Students who will go on to also be members of our community – trained to recognize and react to a cardiac emergency. We now have small to major businesses, town municipalities, public and private buildings and organizations that have also made the commitment to having AED programs – and this includes many clubs and youth groups that have started AED programs voluntarily – simply because they know it is the right thing to do.

Beginning as law, this has created a great opportunity for both public and private partnerships to develop. Throughout New York we have many hospitals, Fire and EMS organizations, Nurses Associations and Foundations like ours that continue to help implement the law by providing free training to school districts and youth athletic organizations. Together we've created an environment of lifesaving awareness, fostering a sense of community and a commitment to serve each other as we work together to save more lives.

We already know that AEDs in Schools can save lives...at least we already know that in New York.

Without a doubt, had an AED been available promptly to our son Louis on March 25th, we know he would be alive today. We believe that AED's will be as common as fire extinguishers and why can't that day be today?

You have the power to make a change here in Connecticut. Lives are at stake, adults and children. We have the technology available, we have the knowledge, we have the experience, and now, we need your commitment.

You cannot – and should not - put a price tag on the life of any child.

In New York we are counting lives saved - not lost. Let's do the same for Connecticut, by passing bill SB981.